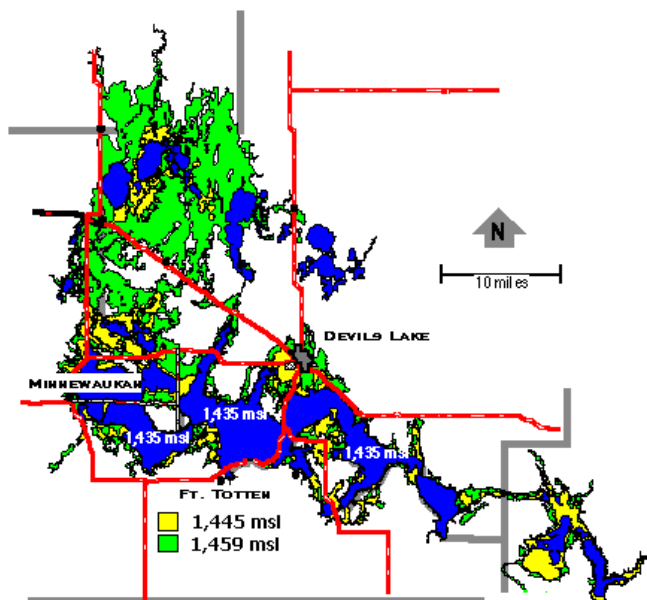




US Army Corps
of Engineers
St. Paul District

Information Paper

Flood Control: Red River of the North, Devils Lake Basin, N.D.



Devils Lake, N.D. (Map courtesy of N.D. State Water Commission)

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Location/Description

Devils Lake is located in a closed basin in semi-arid northeastern North Dakota. Depending on climatological patterns, the lake levels may vary substantially. Since 1993, Devils Lake has risen over 25 feet and flooded homes, roads, farmlands, utilities, railways and threatened several communities. During this period, the lake has expanded from 70 square miles to 195 square miles. The lake is now higher than at any time since the 1830s. Because of the high water, more than \$300 million in federal emergency response funding has been spent to relocate people, raise roads and build levees. The lake level is currently at an elevation of almost 1,448 feet above mean sea level (msl), the highest recorded stage. If the lake rises to elevation 1,459 msl, areas downstream (extending into Canada) will be threatened including the Sheyenne River and the Red River of the North, which flows into Manitoba, Canada. Overflows into these rivers may threaten water quality standards because Devils Lake contains high concentrations of solids including chlorides and sulfates. The Army Corps of Engineers estimates that an additional \$500 million in potential damages would occur around the lake alone, if levels continue to rise, and even greater damages downstream if the lake reached levels where it overflows into the Sheyenne River. The greatest impact would be to the city of Devils Lake and to four major highways in the area.

Background

In 1993, the Corps of Engineers and the North Dakota State Water Commission agreed to proceed with a cost-shared feasibility study. Due to rising lake levels and the threat of further flood damages, the Corps accelerated portions of the flood control project selected in the reconnaissance report at the request of the North Dakota congressional delegation. A Contingency Plan prepared in February 1996 presented options that might be implemented if the lake continued to rise. As a follow-up to the Contingency Plan, the Corps prepared an Emergency Outlet Plan in August 1996 for an outlet from Devils Lake to the Sheyenne River. The outlet plan has a three-year implementation period. Funds for engineering, design and environmental studies of an emergency outlet were provided in the 1997 Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act signed by the President on June 12, 1997. The Energy and Water Development Appropriations Act of 1998, signed by the President on Oct. 13, 1997, also includes \$5 million to initiate construction of the outlet, subject to a number of conditions (including technical soundness, economic justification, environmental acceptability, determination of emergency need and compliance with Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909).

Status

Congress has provided additional funds to complete the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and the pre-construction engineering and design work. The Corps expects this work to be done by September 2002, at which time construction would proceed only if flood conditions continue to exist, all legal requirements have been met, and the Record of Decision supports construction.

Additional

The most feasible outlet routes cross or are adjacent to the Spirit Lake Tribe lands. Downstream interests in the Red River basin and Canada are concerned about the release of Devils Lake water for flood control purposes, because of both concerns about biotic transfer and the high salinity of the lake's water threatening downstream water quality. The Energy and Water Development Appropriations Act of 1998 removed consideration of an inlet under the Devils Lake basin study authorities.

Authority

The Corps of Engineers, using the authorities provided to the Secretary of the Army, has been conducting engineering and environmental studies and analyses of the basin. The latest authorities focus on the development of design and environmental impact studies for an outlet from Devils Lake to the Sheyenne River. The principal authorities for this work include the Energy and Water Development Appropriations Acts of 1999 and 1998, the 1997 Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act for Recovery from Natural Disasters, and the Energy and Water Development Appropriations Act of 1993.

Fiscal

Pre-construction Engineering Design (PED)/EIS costs are estimated to be \$12.7 million. Allocations through fiscal 2001 have been \$11